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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Committee on Technology for Development
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**Strengthening Governments' role in Internet governance:
the Arab process**

Summary

The present document reviews progress made in discussions regarding public policies on developing and using the Internet under the Arab Dialogue on Internet Governance of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States. It highlights updates to the Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance and the adoption of a charter for the Arab Internet Governance Forum (AIGF). It also provides an overview of preparations for the fifth annual AIGF conference, to be held in June 2019.

The Committee on Technology for Development is invited to discuss the present document, propose ways of enhancing government contributions to AIGF deliberations and outcomes, and encourage participation in all AIGF activities.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-3	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. UPDATING THE ARAB DIALOGUE ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE ...	4-26	3
A. Overview of the Arab Dialogue and AIGF2020 Initiative	4-6	3
B. Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance: Second Edition.....	7-14	4
C. Charter of the Arab Internet Governance Forum for the period 2018-2025: objectives, structure and financing	15-26	6
II. PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIFTH AIGF CONFERENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS	27-36	10
A. First preparatory meeting.....	30	11
B. Second preparatory meeting	31-32	11
C. Third preparatory meeting	33-34	11
D. Recommendations	35-36	11

Introduction

1. The activities undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in the field of digital technology and Internet governance come under a programme developed to strengthen support to Arab countries in those fields, entitled Information Society and Digital Economy Hub for the Arab Region (ISDEHAR).
2. The ESCWA secretariat aims to support member States in the context of ISDEHAR in the following areas: strategic frameworks for the information society and sustainable development; governance and regulatory and legal frameworks; information and communications technology (ICT) industries to strengthen productivity, competitiveness and economic growth; digital transformation, institutional development and social inclusion. ISDEHAR also includes capacity-building activities.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ISDEHAR PROGRAMME

International and regional strategic frameworks		
Economy Competitiveness Production for economic growth	State Government Infrastructure and regulatory environment Legal rights	Society Digital transformation Institutional development for social inclusion
Capacity-building		

3. The present document reviews progress made in discussions regarding public policies on developing and using the Internet under the Arab Dialogue on Internet Governance of ESCWA and the League of Arab States. It highlights updates to the Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance and the adoption of a charter for the Arab Internet Governance Forum (AIGF). It also provides an overview of preparations for the fifth annual AIGF conference, to be held in June 2019.

I. UPDATING THE ARAB DIALOGUE ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE

A. OVERVIEW OF THE ARAB DIALOGUE AND AIGF2020 INITIATIVE

4. ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, launched [the Arab Dialogue on Internet Governance](#) in 2009, and issued [the Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance: Framework, Principles and Objectives](#). The Roadmap was adopted by key stakeholders in October 2010, who also confirmed the need for an Arab IGF through the Call of Arab Stakeholders: Towards Activating Comprehensive Arab Cooperation for Internet Governance, Regionally and Internationally, in line with the global Internet Governance Forum established in 2006.
5. The Arab IGF was established in 2012, in a manner consistent with the mandate of the global IGF, and with the aim of involving stakeholders (Governments, the private sector, civil society and regional organizations) in an open dialogue on policy issues related to the Internet, including access, security and privacy, and openness.
6. Since its establishment in 2010, AIGF has held four annual meetings. At the close of the fourth meeting, held in Beirut in 2015, ESCWA and the League of Arab States launched the [AIGF2020 Initiative](#) to review progress achieved by the Forum since 2012 and to improve its performance. Under the Initiative, [the Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance](#) was updated and a [new charter for the Forum](#) was proposed. The following sections provide an overview of those two documents.

B. ARAB ROADMAP ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE: SECOND EDITION

7. The updated [Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance](#) was published in January 2018, aimed at guiding decision makers in preparing national and regional plans on Internet governance and in benefiting from digital technologies to achieve sustainable development. Priority issues in the updated roadmap are the ones that can support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially policies on meaningful access for inclusion; security and trust policies; institutional empowerment policies; policies on Internet innovations and emerging ecosystems; human development policies; policies on critical Internet resources and network infrastructure; and policies on cultural and linguistic diversity.

1. *Policies on meaningful access for inclusion*

8. Policies on meaningful access for inclusion aim to eliminate barriers that limit people's access to the Internet and their ability to use it easily and beneficially. Such obstacles include language barriers (such as the language of domain names) and discrimination against certain social groups, including women. Priority has been given to this issue, which includes the following goals:

- (a) Ensuring adequate and affordable access to broadband services for all in the region;
- (b) Providing adequate and affordable international access;
- (c) Improving user experiences and the benefits resulting from Internet use;
- (d) Strengthening frequency coordination;
- (e) Enhancing meaningful access;
- (f) Increasing Arabic top-level domains in the domain name system.

2. *Security and trust policies*

9. Security and trust policies cover traditional cybersecurity issues, which include national and international structures and legal systems to ensure Internet security, privacy and safety and the protection of user ownership, especially minors and novice users. They also cover transparency in dealing with the vast amount of data resulting from Internet use, and the need to adopt policies on open data. Goals of security and trust policies include the following:

- (a) Strengthening legal frameworks related to Internet governance issues, and implementing them at the national and regional levels;
- (b) Reducing cybercrime risks;
- (c) Strengthening cybersecurity;
- (d) Increasing privacy protection;
- (e) Tackling security challenges related to new technologies.

3. *Institutional empowerment policies*

10. Institutional empowerment policies are concerned with participation in the development of a global public policy on the Internet, so as to formulate a more balanced, international, transparent, accountable and institutional governance plan. This process became increasingly important following the establishment of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), which has not tackled many issues. The issue of enhanced cooperation (primarily concerned with increasing the role of Governments) must be addressed in line with global work aimed at devising an appropriate mechanism for its implementation. The participation of developing countries in policymaking has increased significantly over the years, but there is still a great need to strengthen their involvement and make it more efficient so as to avoid further delays in their development (such as reducing high fees for generic top-level domain (gTLD) implementation, and developing a dispute resolution mechanism for tenders that may not be appropriate for developing countries). Public awareness

and capacity-building are a fundamental pillar for improving participation and involving enough people and resources in the Internet governance process. Goals of institutional empowerment policies include the following:

- (a) Playing a key role in developing more balanced, international, transparent and accountable institutional mechanisms for governance, so as to develop global public policies;
- (b) Strengthening cooperation between Arab Governments in the field of Internet governance policies;
- (c) Improving strategic awareness;
- (d) Developing relationships between national/regional institutions and international actors concerned with Internet governance.

4. Policies on Internet innovations and emerging ecosystems

11. Policies on Internet innovations and emerging ecosystems cover issues related to new opportunities provided by the Internet, including economic opportunities and useful applications that go beyond entertainment by providing real economic or social added value. Goals of policies on Internet innovations and emerging ecosystems include the following:

- (a) Achieving integration in the global market;
- (b) Increasing the efficiency of e-commerce transactions;
- (c) Enabling the regional market to maximize the impact of volume;
- (d) Disseminating knowledge on available opportunities;
- (e) Participating in international innovation processes.

5. Human development policies

12. Human development policies cover issues related to human rights, youth participation, operationalizing the Internet as a tool for achieving social development, and using available social networks to enhance dialogue between various bodies active in society and eliminating barriers between all social groups. Goals of human development policies include the following:

- (a) Empowering women on the Internet;
- (b) Strengthening youth participation in Internet governance processes;
- (c) Meeting the special needs of certain users;
- (d) Identifying user rights and obligations on the Internet;
- (e) Expanding the scope of the rights of the child to cover the Internet.

6. Policies on critical Internet resources and network infrastructure

13. Policies on critical Internet resources and network infrastructure focus on ensuring that the following critical Internet resources are equitably managed: (a) domain home folders and root server systems; (b) domain names; (c) IP addresses; (d) innovative and convergent technologies; and (e) technical standards. Goals of policies on critical Internet resources and network infrastructure include the following:

- (a) Promoting symmetry;
- (b) Applying Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6);
- (c) Tackling the challenge of instant messaging;
- (d) Improving the operation of domain name systems.

7. *Policies on cultural and linguistic diversity*

14. Policies on cultural and linguistic diversity aim to enhance diversity on the Internet by increasing digital content related to Arab culture and other cultures and local groups in the region.

C. CHARTER OF THE ARAB INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM FOR THE PERIOD 2018-2025:
OBJECTIVES, STRUCTURE AND FINANCING

1. *Objectives*

15. The AIGF2020 Initiative included forming the Technical Cooperation Working Group to develop the Forum and update its objectives. The following were the objectives of the Forum in its first phase:¹

(a) Discuss policy issues related to Internet governance, in particular those raised within the global IGF, with a view to promoting access to the Internet and ensuring its security, stability and development;

(b) Facilitate the exchange of information, best practices, lessons learned and knowledge, particularly with experts in public policy, technology and academic matters; and disseminate the recommendations and proposals emanating from discussions held within the Arab IGF;

(c) Reach a common understanding of the priorities of Internet governance and mechanisms to respond to the specific needs of Arab countries;

(d) Discuss emerging technologies and make recommendations thereon;

(e) Contribute to capacity-building and development in the area of Internet governance in Arab countries; and promote the involvement of all stakeholders to fully utilize available knowledge and expertise;

(f) Disseminate the Arab perspective regarding Internet governance at the global level and support Arab stakeholders in the formulation of Internet governance policies, without assigning oversight functions to the Arab IGF or turning it into a substitute for existing mechanisms, institutions or organizations;

(g) Communicate with regional and international forums on Internet governance to facilitate experience sharing and knowledge transfer.

16. The Technical Cooperation Working Group proposed a new vision for the Forum's objectives, namely four key objectives and several sub-objectives, to increase the impact of AIGF at the international level and to strengthen the research and scientific component therein, as shown in the box.

Objectives of the Arab Internet Governance Forum in its new phase

Objective 1. Contribute to developing Internet governance areas in Arab countries

- 1.1 Raise awareness of Internet governance while highlighting controversial issues (which were the reason why the Forum was launched in the first place);
- 1.2 Build the capacity of all stakeholders in all areas of Internet governance;
- 1.3 Enhance all stakeholder participation to optimally benefit from available resources, knowledge and expertise;

¹ E/ESCWA/TDD/2017/IG.1/4(Part I).

- 1.4 Disseminate studies, research, discussions, recommendations and proposals;
- 1.5 Coordinate effectively in Internet governance issues at the regional level, including in cybersecurity, standardizing governance mechanisms, and developing access infrastructure and exchange points;
- 1.6 Adopt IPv6 and build related capacity in the Arab region;
- 1.7 Expand Arabic top-level domains;
- 1.8 Raise awareness on openness and reduce access restrictions in the Arab region.

Objective 2. Reconcile perspectives to reach unified Arab positions on Internet governance priorities and on mechanisms to respond to special needs in Arab countries, so as to achieve sustainable development

- 2.1 Discuss public policy issues related to Internet governance, especially issues addressed at the global IGF, and in particular those that directly or indirectly concern Arab countries;
- 2.2 Work with all partners to ensure suitable conditions for providing infrastructure investments to the Internet industry and services;
- 2.3 Urge the enactment of laws and regulations that liberalize the Internet industry and services, and provide the necessary competition in that regard;
- 2.4 Exchange information and best practices and draw lessons and knowledge, especially from political and technical experts and academics;
- 2.5 Enhance the multi-stakeholder dialogue model for Internet governance in Arab countries through regional and national forums;
- 2.6 Cooperate to improve Arabic content services;
- 2.7 Collaborate in developing Arab cybersecurity and ensure the convergence of relevant legal and policy frameworks;
- 2.8 Improve Arab knowledge exchange and the expression of views.

Objective 3. Transfer the Arab perspective to the global level and support the Arab role in developing international policies for Internet governance

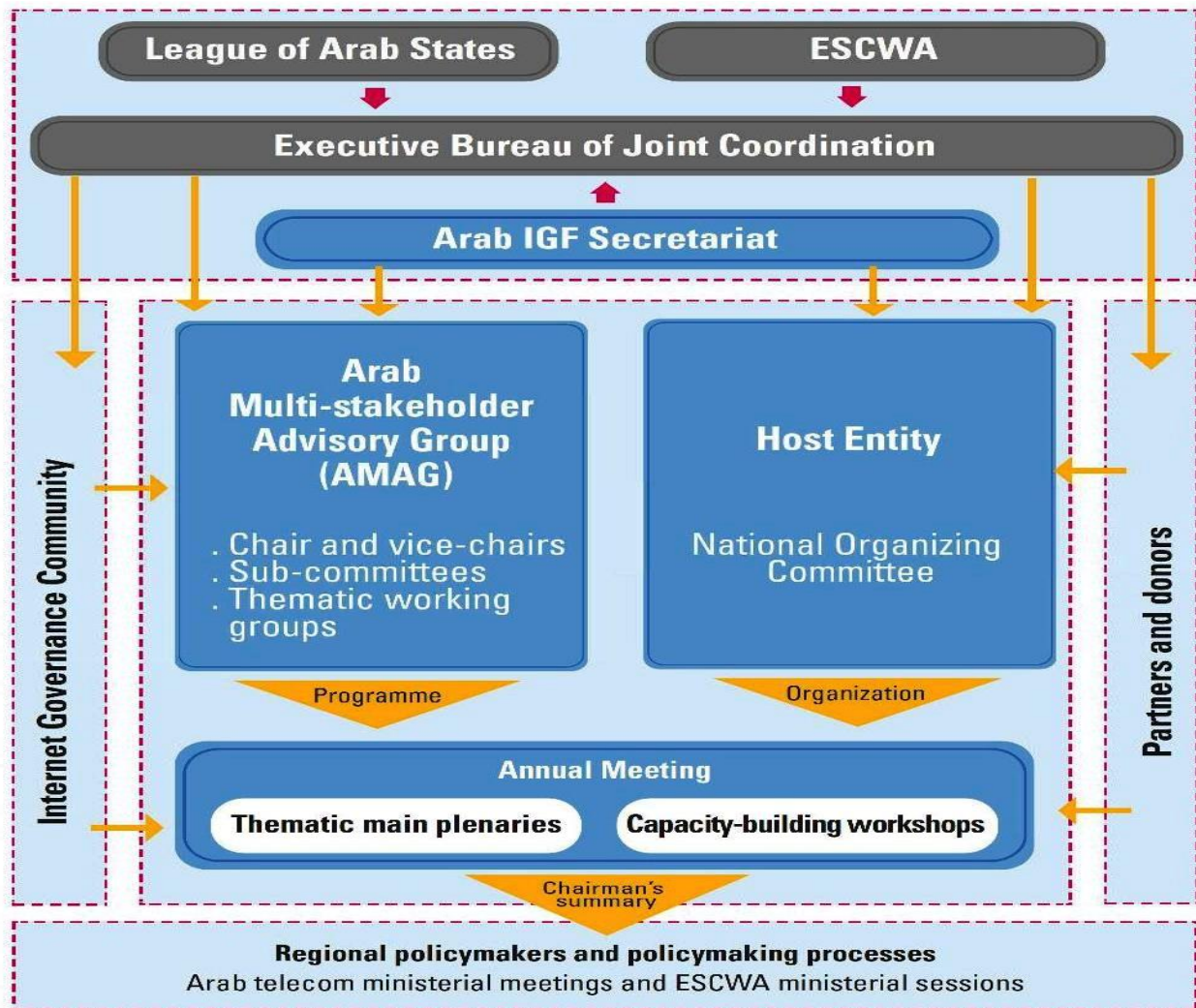
- 3.1 Communicate with regional and international forums on Internet governance to facilitate the exchange of expertise and the transfer of knowledge;
- 3.2 Encourage the use of Arabic in cyberspace and develop Arabic digital content.

Objective 4. Strive to develop international Internet governance mechanisms to ensure the non-discriminatory treatment of all countries, in general, and to guarantee the interests of Arab countries, in particular, so as to enhance access to the Internet and strengthen its security and stability

2. Founding and supporting bodies of the Forum

17. The Technical Cooperation Working Group to advance AIGF reviewed the Forum's previous structure (figure 1) to enhance its working mechanisms and operation efficiency, and to strengthen Governments' role therein while taking into account the nature of the policymaking system in Arab countries and the Arab vision of a Government-led policymaking process.

Figure 1. Arab Internet Governance Forum structure



18. The Working Group proposed a new vision for the founding and supporting bodies of the Forum and for other partners. In that regard, the charter identifies the following mechanisms and roles:

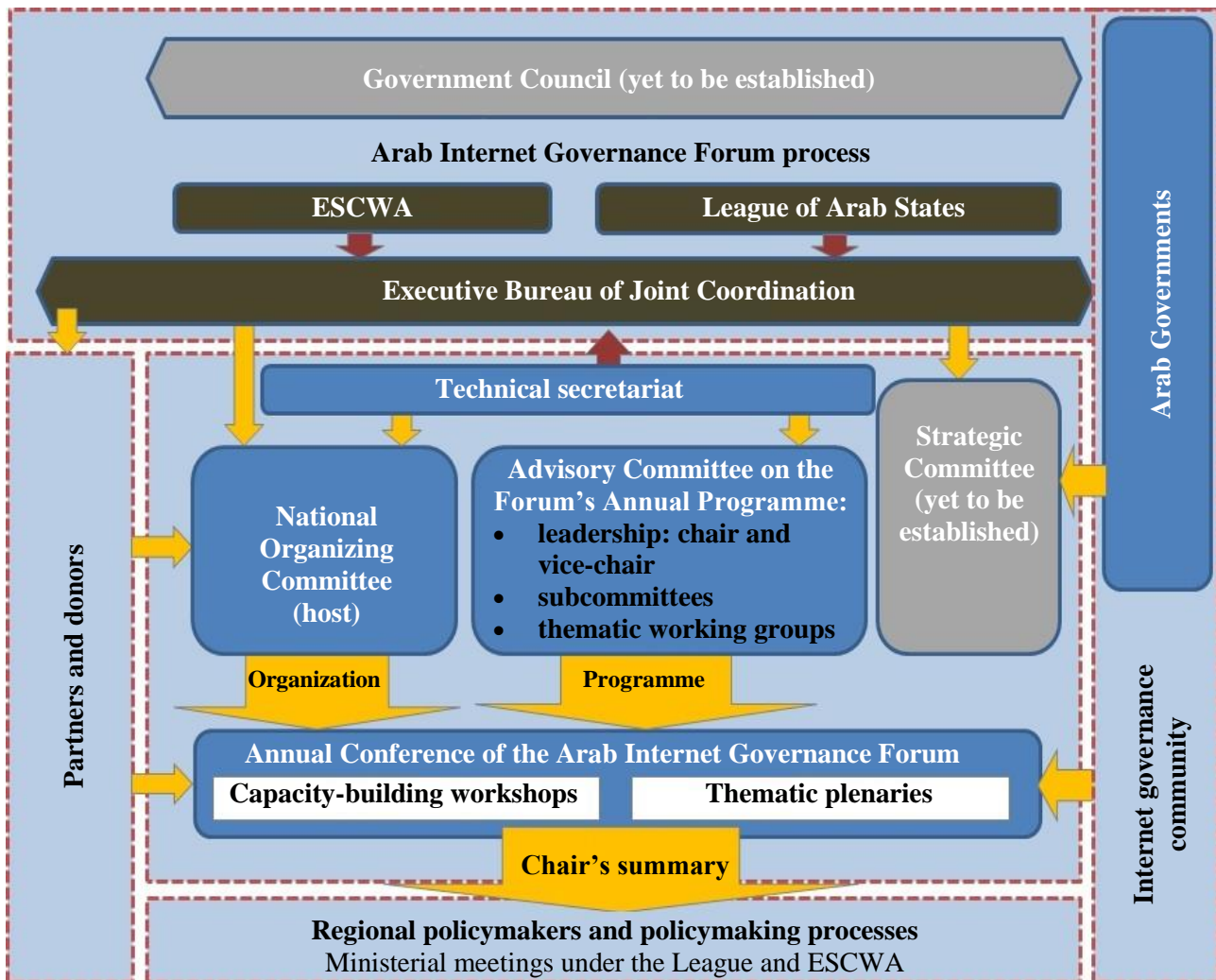
(a) *Government Council* (new)

19. The Executive Bureau will become the executive arm of an inclusive Government Council comprising representatives of Arab Governments. The Executive Bureau will present to the Council issues that concern Governments to gauge official opinions on them. Council members will be appointed by Arab States biennially.

(b) *Technical secretariat* (amended)

20. The technical secretariat will cooperate with the Executive Bureau and will complete the role assigned to it. It will rotate every three years at the latest, based on terms of reference and obligations to be specified by the two umbrella organizations. Criteria and contractual agreements will be agreed between the body that will function as the technical secretariat and the umbrella organizations to improve accountability. The technical secretariat will carry out specific functions as set out in the Charter.

Figure 2. Updated Arab Internet Governance Forum structure



(c) *Advisory Committee on the Forum's Annual Programme* (amended)

21. The Advisory Committee is directly linked to the Executive Bureau. It is an advisory mechanism comprising representatives of all stakeholders. Its mandate covers the programme of the Arab IGF Conference from the start of the preparatory process until the issuance of the final report. Membership and chairing of the Advisory Group are limited to a maximum of two years. The Advisory Group will carry out specific functions as set out in the Charter.

(d) *Strategic Committee* (new)

22. The Executive Bureau will appoint various stakeholders as members of the Strategic Committee, mainly comprising government experts, to undertake the following:

(a) Analysing and evaluating AIGF outcomes and processes, and preparing cross-cutting reports unrelated to the annual conference schedule;

(b) Communicating with the technical teams of the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers, national and regional forums and other bodies globally to exchange opinions and expertise;

(c) Supporting the Executive Bureau in increasing Governments and the Internet community's trust regarding the alignment between AIGF inputs and outputs, and its strategic objectives.

3. *Financing and partnerships*

23. Given the importance of AIGF financing for organizing its annual meetings (which will be designated as ‘conferences’ in the new phase) and to ensure their continuity, efforts and activities are needed to facilitate access to financing and ensure its sustainability through the following:

(a) *Establishing a fund for AIGF activities*

24. A fund can be established at one of the umbrella organizations to finance AIGF activities, with a specific system that identifies a disbursement officer and an auditor.

(b) *Establishing an association to support the Forum*

25. In the future, if necessary, an association to support the AIGF may be established, similar to the global Internet Governance Forum Support Association (IGFSA). The membership of the association can be determined along with measures for the acceptance of financial and in-kind donations. States can be given the opportunity to nominate themselves to host the association’s headquarters or request one of the umbrella organizations to host it. The Association’s rules of procedure would be formulated according to the host State’s regulations for associations.

(c) *Other financing mechanisms and tools*

26. The following mechanism and tools can be added to the above:

(a) Benefiting from the resources of the IGF Trust Fund administered by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

(b) Benefiting from IGFSA resources;

(c) Forming a working group under the supervision of the two umbrella organizations to forge partnerships with AIGF stakeholders and to communicate with Arab government departments on AIGF financing;

(d) Preparing information and marketing material on the Forum and disseminating them to financing bodies; the material should show the role, objectives and activities of AIGF, its importance in developing activities related to the Internet, and its financing needs;

(e) Encouraging potential hosts by preparing a booklet of simplified conditions to host the Forum, and by reducing the costs of holding the annual AIGF conference that are borne by the host.

II. PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIFTH AIGF CONFERENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

27. ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, formed the Advisory Committee on the Forum’s Annual Programme, comprising 33 experts and representatives of Arab government departments that participated in open preparatory meetings and the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group, in preparation for the fifth AIGF conference to be held in the second half of 2019. The Advisory Committee on the Forum’s Annual Programme comprised representatives of 10 Arab States, namely Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen.

28. The Advisory Committee’s mandate covers the annual programme of the AIGF conference from the beginning of the preparatory process until the issuance of the report. The Advisory Committee’s functions include preparing substantive sessions and identifying speakers; developing and evaluating workshops; and calling for and evaluating grant requests. Following the annual conference, it will prepare the technical component of the final report, known as the “Chair’s summary”.

29. The Advisory Committee on the Forum’s Annual Programme has held three preparatory meetings for the fifth AIGF conference.

A. FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING

30. ESCWA and the League of Arab States held [Open consultations and an Arab Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in preparation for the fifth AIGF conference](#) (Beirut, 16-19 July 2018), resulting in adopting the change of the name of the Arab Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (AMAG) to Arab Multi-stakeholder Programme Advisory Committee (AMPAC), as per the Charter; as well as in the production of the the proposal of themes and common issues for the Forum’s work programme. The proposed themes are: (a) effective access to the Internet for inclusiveness and diversity; (b) cybersecurity, privacy, trust and peace; (c) digital transformation and the Internet economy; (d) institutional empowerment and participation in public policymaking on the Internet – the global and regional dimensions; and (d) the social and human impact of the Internet. Common issues that should be covered in all the themes are: (a) gender equality and women’s empowerment; (b) human development and capacity-building; and (c) legislative frameworks.

B. SECOND PREPARATORY MEETING

31. The Advisory Committee on the Forum’s Annual Programme held a second preparatory meeting on the theme “[Arab regional dialogue and experts meeting on Internet governance and cybersecurity nexus – Promoting trust in cyberspace](#)” (Beirut, 4-7 December 2018). The meeting addressed developments regarding hosting the fifth AIGF conference, and reviewed the preparatory work of working groups formed to prepare for the AIGF main sessions.

32. Key outcomes of the meeting include identifying working papers for the main sessions of the fifth AIGF conference, which contain the titles of the sessions and background and substantive information on each, the length of each session and how discussions will be organized, and a list of principal research topics.

C. THIRD PREPARATORY MEETING

33. ESCWA and the League of Arab States will hold the third preparatory meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Forum’s Annual Programme in parallel with the second session of the Committee on Technology for Development and as part of the Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Beirut, 19-21 March 2019).

34. The Advisory Committee will continue planning the main sessions of the fifth AIGF conference by discussing lists of speakers for the plenary sessions proposed by coordinators of the thematic working groups, and adopting a suitable slogan for 2019 that is consistent with the themes of the main sessions. ESCWA proposed the slogan “Internet governance for inclusiveness and empowerment”, in line with the 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. The Advisory Committee will discuss the call for grant applications to ensure inclusiveness, transparency and fairness; and the workshops to be included in the programme in accordance with adopted mechanisms, so as to complete the programme and present it to the nominated host.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

35. The ESCWA secretariat invites the Committee on Technology for Development to consider the following recommendations:

(a) Stress the importance of the Arab dialogue on Internet policies at the global and regional levels, and that national policies must remain a sovereign issue;

(b) Request policymakers in Arab Governments to undertake a greater role in AIGF work and existing structures, and to appoint representatives as members of the new Strategic Committee.

36. The ESCWA secretariat will continue efforts to motivate change and innovation in formulating policies on digital technology and Internet governance through ISDEHAR and its activities, which include analytical studies, meetings, advisory services and training sessions. Member States are invited to coordinate with ESCWA to determine their level of participation and ways to benefit from its services under ISDEHAR.
